



CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES

April 4, 2008

The Honorable Robert M. Gates
Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon Room 3E880
Washington, DC 20301-1000

Dear Mr. Secretary:

During Easter weekend I traveled with Congressional Delegation Marshall¹ to Iraq. The Delegation met with US military and Iraqi Security Forces as well as key US Embassy and Iraqi Government officials.² The primary purpose of the trip was to continue oversight of security and political developments and to make specific recommendations concerning the direction of US policy.

We are making progress in Iraq. The surge is working and security has improved dramatically. Tribal leaders working in conjunction with Coalition Forces have secured al-Anbar Province. The entire Kurdish region is prospering economically and in Diyala Province, the Sons of Iraq are helping to stabilize the area. Al-Qaeda is primarily isolated in the Northern region and is being relentlessly pursued.

¹The delegation included Representatives Jim Marshall (D-GA), Christopher Shays (R-CT), Ted Poe (R-TX) and Patrick McHenry (R-NC) as well as Dr. R. Nicholas Palarino (Senior Investigator and Policy Advisor, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform) and Major Toby Patterson (Marine Corps Liaison Officer).

² At Forward Operating Base Warhorse in Diyala Governate: Brigadier General James Boozer, Deputy Commanding General Multi-National Division—North. At Joint Security Station in Old Baquba: Colonel John Lehr, Commander, 4-2 Stryker Brigade Combat Team, constituent soldiers from Georgia, Connecticut, Texas and North Carolina and Captain Ibn Khadum, Commander, 2d Company, 2d Battalion 18th Brigade, 5th Iraqi Army Division. At Ar-Rashid Hotel in the International Zone: representatives from the Office of Moqtada al-Sadr (OMS), including Said Mahdi Shawky (OMS and delegation spokesman), Said Hasan al Massawi (OMS), Imam Shoukut al Zubaidy (Imam of Husainiya Zahrah), Mr. Hasa Shamma (Deputy Chair - District Council), and Mr. Khudair Jabbar (District Council Member). At the Vice President's residence in the International Zone: Vice President Tariq al-Hashimi. At the US Embassy: General David H. Petraeus, Commander Multi-National Force—Iraq and Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker, US Ambassador to Iraq. At Victory Base Complex: Brigadier General William F. Grimsley, Deputy Commanding General, Multi-National Force—Baghdad and constituent soldiers from Georgia, Connecticut, Texas and North Carolina. At Forward Operating Base Loyalty: Lieutenant Colonel Gregory Baine, Commander, 2d Battalion, 30th Infantry Regiment, 10th Mountain Division. At Joint Security Station al-Baladiyyat, 9 Nissan, Baghdad with Brigadier General Ali al-Hasam, Commander 8th Brigade, 2d Iraqi National, Police Division. At Al-Fawah Palace, Victory Operating Base: General Lloyd Austin, Commander Multi-National Corps—Iraq.

Rogue militias operate openly in some cities, however Prime Minister Maliki is beginning to take steps to confront these militias and consolidate control over the entire country.

The Council of Representatives (CoR) passed several significant pieces of legislation. In January 2008, the Justice and Accountability Law was passed, opening up government jobs to former members of Saddam Hussein's Baath Party—the bureaucrats, officials, city workers, teachers, soldiers and police officers—who made the government work until they were barred from office after the American invasion in 2003.

Also in January 2008, a new flag of Iraq was adapted and is a further sign of political progress. Although the Hydrocarbon Law, which would establish oil revenue distribution, has not been passed by the CoR, such revenues are already being distributed throughout the country without a law.

More recently the CoR passed the Provincial Powers Law, which sets forth the relationship between the central and provincial governments and establishes a deadline for provincial council elections; the Amnesty Law, which provides limited amnesty to Iraqis in custody; and the 2008 budget, which allocates revenues.

The improved security situation has provided an opportunity for Iraqi leaders to enact additional legislative initiatives to assist in uniting the Iraqi people.

The following observations and recommendations are based on my most recent trip and are provided for your consideration:

Observation: The United States has had over 4,000 of our military killed, over 30,000 wounded, and spent close to \$500 billion to free Iraqi citizens.

Iraq's oil sales brought in \$41 billion in 2007, and over \$10 billion in 2008 through March 5, 2008. Approximately \$12 billion is in an account into which Iraqis put revenues, and out of which they draw for expenditures. Another account contains \$27 billion in currency reserves. There have been problems allocating and spending these funds.

It is unacceptable that Iraqis are accumulating billions of dollars in accounts from oil revenues and the United States spends billions of dollars on Iraq's defense and economic development.

Recommendation: Funding for future Iraq reconstruction initiatives and payments for its security, health and welfare should come from Iraq revenues. If the Iraqi Government cannot properly allocate and spend its revenues for Iraqi citizens then these revenues should be given to the United States to take on this task.

Observation: Iraqi citizens complain that many of their politicians live in relative safety in the International Zone, are paid well and have the opportunity to travel all over the world. These politicians, Iraqi citizens argue, appear indifferent to the plight and suffering of those living outside the International Zone.

For example, during our meetings they ask for medical assistance, help building infrastructure, and partnering between Iraqi and United States colleges and universities.

Recommendation: US Government representatives should stress the need for Iraqi politicians to meet more often with their constituents to understand their plight and act on their concerns.

Recommendation: The US Department of State should encourage US universities to interact with Iraqi universities. To facilitate this interaction, US Embassy Baghdad should develop a list of Iraqi university contacts and make this list available to institutions of higher education in the United States.

Recommendation: Inexpensive laptop computers should be provided by the Iraqi government to college students to help them with their studies. This could also facilitate linking Iraqi students to institutions throughout the world.

Observation: Many Iraqis consider the presence of Coalition Forces throughout their country as an occupying force, despite the fact Iraq is a sovereign nation.

In June 2007, I recommended: “The Iraqi people should conduct a plebiscite to determine whether they want Coalition Forces to withdraw in the next few months or continue their mission to stabilize the country.” In June and December 2007 I recommended: “...the US Government begin negotiations over the status of American forces ... [in Iraq].”

Recommendation: The United States and the Iraqi government should conclude negotiations on the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) as soon as possible.

Once completed, the Iraqi Government should conduct a plebiscite that accepts or rejects the agreement. No agreement should go into effect unless two-thirds of Iraqi voters endorse it.

Observation: There are approximately 90,000 Concerned Local Citizens (CLC) operating in conjunction with US and Iraqi Security Forces to counter Al-Qaeda and secure Iraq. As security continues to improve there will be less need for the CLCs.

Recommendation: These fighters should know there is a place for them in Iraqi society and a future for their families. A plan should be developed to address how many CLCs will be integrated into Iraqi Security Forces, non-military government jobs, or receive employment training.

Observation: As part of the new counterinsurgency strategy, Coalition and Iraqi Security Forces are clearing areas and stationing forces in those areas so al-Qaeda, insurgents, and/or criminal elements do not return. Iraqis may not have enough security forces to conduct future military operations, and at the same time hold onto the ones already cleared.

In October 2006, I recommended: “... the Iraqi government in conjunction with the Multi-National Force-Iraq ... increase as quickly as possible the size of the Iraqi Security Forces from the present planned strength of 325,000 to at least 440,000 security forces in the non-Kurdish areas of Iraq.” The number of authorized Iraqi Security Forces in the non-Kurdish regions, though 527,844, may still not be adequate to replace Coalition Forces.

Recommendation: The Government of Iraq, with the assistance of US military planners, should be asked to conduct a comprehensive review of their force structure. If the study concludes more Iraqi Security Forces are needed, the training and equipping of those forces should begin immediately.

Recommendation: As the Iraqi Security Forces continue to grow, and become more effective and powerful, the United States should guard against a military coup. US forces should ensure Iraqi Security Forces are properly trained as protectors of democracy and answerable to their elected officials.

Observation: Iraqi Security Forces still lack the necessary logistical capability to operate independently. The new Multi-National Force—Iraq Corps Commander is placing increased emphasis on logistical support.

In December 2007, I recommended “... Iraqis develop logistical, medical and supply forces required to support their army. This will eventually allow Iraqi Security Forces to become self-sustaining and alleviate the United States of this responsibility.”

Recommendation: I renew my recommendation and fully support the Corps Commander in his efforts to increase Iraqi Security Force capabilities—especially in the development of logistical, medical and supply forces—to become more self-sufficient.

Observation: Before the Iraqi legislative elections, in October 2005, I recommended, “The US Agency for International Development [USAID], and organizations such as the US Institute of Peace [USIP], National Democratic Institute [NDI] and International Republican Institute [IRI], should be provided additional funding in order to redouble their efforts providing training for elections and institution building.” Iraqi law now requires provincial elections be held before October 2008.

Recommendation: We should once again call on the United Nations, USAID, USIP, NDI and IRI to begin now to help Iraqis prepare for the provincial elections and assist in the establishment of local government institutions.

Observation: We cannot win Iraq just in Iraq. In December 2006, I made the observation, "Turkey and Egypt are in communication with Syria, and to a lesser extent with Iran. President Talabani recently returned from Iran and reported Iran wishes to talk directly with the United States concerning Iraq and possibly other matters." I recommended, "The United States should engage in direct discussions with both Syria and Iran on Iraq."

Recommendation: I renew my recommendation to engage Iraq's neighbors in direct discussions about how to stabilize the region.

Observation: The bipartisan Iraq Study Group, chaired by James Baker and Lee Hamilton, provided the American public with an independent assessment of Iraq and was an important contribution.

I sponsored a successful amendment to the FY 2008 Department of State and Foreign Operations Appropriations Act (H.R. 2764), appropriating one million dollars for the United States Institute of Peace to reconstitute the Iraqi Study Group. The amendment passed by a vote of 355 to 69.

Recommendation: I renew my recommendations of June and December 2007, that this Group be re-engaged and present new assessments and conclusions to the American public and the president-elect by the end of the year.

In concluding, there has been noticeable progress in Iraq, especially as it relates to security. We need this forward momentum to continue. We have also seen some progress from Iraqi legislators. Although I believe they should and could be doing more, we must remember we have asked a great deal from a country and its leaders who have limited experience with democracy. We should give them as much time as practical to work out their differences.

Timelines are essential. Some Iraqis feel we will never leave, while others believe we will leave too soon. Establishment of timelines will let both extremes know we will leave when Iraq is stable and able to maintain its own security, but not stay with such a large presence indefinitely.

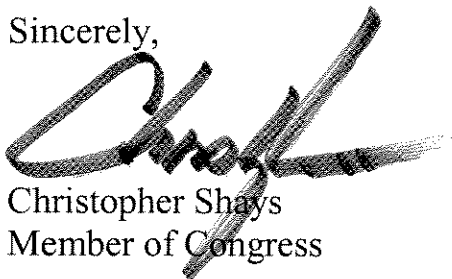
A timeline for US troop drawdown is important to help motivate the Iraqi Government to take bolder efforts to stabilize its country. Our forces should continue to be reduced, with minimal exception, by approximately 5,000 troops per month until we reach a level of 50,000 to 60,000. This reduction rate is safe and responsible and our best hope for success.

I have consistently resisted a precipitous withdrawal because it would erase the hard-fought gains we have attained. We have seen what happened in Basra when British forces withdrew too soon. In Basra rogue elements filled the vacuum and now the Iraqi Government must establish control.

I look forward to hearing from General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker next week and their assessment of how we should continue the drawdown of forces.

These observations are offered in the hope they will be of use in crafting the plans and policies that will capitalize on gains we have made in Iraq. As always, I would welcome the opportunity to discuss these matters with you more fully. If you have any questions, please contact me or Dr. R. Nicholas Palarino, who has accompanied me on all of my trips to Iraq, at 202-225-5074.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Chris Shays", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Christopher Shays
Member of Congress